COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION AND THE WORKFORCE
U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
2181 RAYBURN HOUSE OFFICE BUILDING
WASHINGTON, DC 20515-6100

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Support Flexibility and Innovation – Not Vouchers
Providing States with Flexibility and Options DOES NOT Equal Vouchers

Dear Colleague:

Yesterday we told you about an amendment we intend to offer during House debate on the Improving Education Results for Children with Disabilities Act (H.R. 1350) – an amendment that will provide states with much-needed flexibility as they seek to educate children with disabilities. Unfortunately many have mischaracterized the provisions we are offering as a "voucher" that will harm education and take resources away from states, schools, and children. Nothing could be further from the truth.

The amendment we intend to offer will not provide vouchers – it will simply afford states the flexibility they are seeking to provide individualized options for students with disabilities. As we all know, educating a child with a disability is a critical task, and one that requires flexibility and adaptability. Children with disabilities require an individualized education that will maximize his or her unique abilities while taking into account his or her disability. Our amendment seeks to provide states the ability to ensure parents have access to the most individualized education available for children with disabilities, and to remove restrictions that would otherwise prevent states from creating flexible programs that benefit children.

The amendment would encourage creative solutions that would maximize the individualized education of children with special needs by:

- Encouraging States to establish innovative solutions by providing seed money to develop new programs that could better serve children with disabilities;
- Answering the call of parents of children with disabilities to ensure that educational opportunities are not withheld, and that States may choose to implement as much or as little flexibility as is appropriate – without unnecessary federal restrictions; and
- Allowing States to use federal dollars in flexible programs already utilizing state resources to provide services for children with special needs.

The amendment would NOT establish "vouchers" that could drain precious resources from schools because under the amendment:

- States must voluntarily choose to participate in any program that gets seed money and voluntarily choose to allow its federal funds to follow its State funds – though neither option is required of ANY State;
- Each State must determine which approach and what type of program will best serve the children with disabilities in that State, including options such as other public schools, charter public schools, and private schools -- meaning innovative programs is NOT another way of saying "vouchers"; and
- Minimum safeguards are provided without imposing on States the type of program or approach best fits their population – supplying them with flexibility to make the best decision for their individual students and schools.

Such flexible, innovative approaches can improve options for parents and services for children. Often many parents and advocates have to battle with the state to provide specific funding to allow children to attend a school designed to better serve their needs. Rather than fighting this battle for each and every school, states should have the option to design approaches that encourage the creation and maintenance of such schools that best serve children with disabilities.

Children with disabilities deserve every effort that can be made to provide them with a high quality education, and their options, and the options of states, should not be limited. The amendment we plan to offer seeks to provide flexibility and encourage innovation, ensuring that children with special needs have access to the highest quality education available, and are not left behind.

Sincerely,

/s/   /s/

Jim DeMint (R-SC)   John A. Boehner (R-OH)
Member of Congress   Chairman
                                                 Education and the Workforce Committee